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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR OES/ENV RCASTENBERG AND AF/S LAYLWARD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL ZA

SUBJECT: ZAMBIA SETS ITS "CITES" ON EXPORTING IVORY

¶1. (U) This is an action request; see paragraph 3. Zambian Minister of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources Catherine Namugala told Charge February 10 that the Zambian government (GRZ) plans to press for resumption of the legal sale and export of elephant products, including ivory, at the March 13-25 UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) meeting in Doha. The GRZ intends to pursue an amendment to CITES downgrading Zambian elephants from Appendix I to Appendix II, a GRZ priority, and seeks U.S. support.

¶2. (U) Namugala stated that Zambia ought to have the right to permit the legal, regulated killing of elephants, a "natural resource" the GRZ should use to promote development and address social needs. Zambia hopes that sustainable, well managed "consumptive" tourism will help create jobs, reduce poverty, and fund health and education, Namugala said.

She claimed that Zambia has "too many elephants" that endanger Zambians and, in some regions, prevent "children from going to school." Although the GRZ has accumulated a substantial amount of ivory in locked warehouses, CITES restrictions prevent it from liquidating ivory stocks to raise funds for economic development, social welfare programs, and investments in national infrastructure.

¶3. (SBU) Comment and action request: Zambia's track record on wildlife conservation is not stellar. For example, only a single rhinoceros remains in the country, and the lack of capacity by the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) to prevent poaching has impeded the donation of 16 rhinos from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Furthermore, local contacts in the hospitality industry report that they have caught ZAWA officials red-handed in poaching activities, but their efforts to get the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to prosecute the cases were stymied when GRZ higher-ups apparently told the ACC not to pursue the cases. Lodge owners and guides in Zambia's famed South Luangwa National Park reported that President Banda and his entourage feast on Cape Buffalo and rare Klipspringer antelope during visits to Eastern Province, and reportedly carry plentiful game meat as gifts to local chieftains and home to Lusaka. All of this calls into question the GRZ's motives as well as its abilities to keep elephant culling under control if the flood gates were opened. Embassy requests guidance on the USG position on the sale and export of elephant products in advance of the CITES meeting.

KOPLOVSKY